

February 14, 2023

Members of the Human Services Committee--

I am a member of the Board of Directors of **Building One Community**, the non-profit public service agency responsible for serving and integrating immigrants in Stamford and the surrounding communities. Our agency supports **HB 06616** on behalf of the thousands of clients we serve because its expansion of HUSKY health benefits will promote a safer and healthier community not only for immigrants, but for everyone in the communities where they reside. We applaud this Committee and the General Assembly for the advances in recent years in HUSKY coverage for Connecticut children through age 12 and certain children through age 18 — but they have not gone far enough. Children and young people without medical care are themselves at risk for illness that not only threatens their own lives, but also creates a risk of contagion for all other children, teachers, and other adults with whom they come into contact. Having these youngsters use hospital emergency rooms as their pediatrician or family physician of last resort is expensive, risky, and an inefficient use of scarce hospital resources.

We know from research relied upon by the State Department of Social Services that:

- (a) expanding public health benefits for young people increases college enrollment and postpones the age at which young women have their first child,

- (b) the young adults who have benefited from expanded healthcare access pay more in taxes and require less public assistance in later life, and

- (c) individuals with expanded healthcare access in their growing years have fewer hospitalizations as an adult.

All of these benefits from expanded HUSKY eligibility are critical for the families served by Building One Community. In its 11 years of existence, Building One Community has served over 14,300 immigrants from 117 countries. As a member of the Board, I offer testimony for them because many of them—owing to language barriers, immigration status, education, or their youth—are not in the position to testify for themselves. Some will be able to tell their own stories, and Building One Community will arrange for them to do so on February 14, 2023. But everyone's story matters in much the same way that everyone's health matters.

The COVID pandemic was particularly cruel to our immigrants, but your committee and the General Assembly responded to the heroism of many immigrants who kept our communities functioning with a heroic expansion of HUSKY eligibility, an accomplishment that only a handful of states accomplished before Connecticut. Your approval of **HB 06616** will help cement improvements in healthcare to benefit our state and its future citizens for generations. Thank you for your support.

Mary P. Maarbjerg